



Inala's Romania Tour

**Birds, wildlife and culture of
Transylvania and the Danube Delta**

22 August to 5 September 2022

Final itinerary: Prepared by Dr Tonia Cochran, Inala Nature Tours 11 January 2020.

Romania is a south-eastern European country bordered by the Black Sea to the east, the Ukraine and Moldova to the north, Bulgaria to the south and Serbia and Hungary to the west. The relatively inaccessible forested region of Transylvania, ringed by the Carpathian Mountains is home to the largest number of large carnivores (Brown Bear, Lynx and Wolf) in Europe; the extensive plains to the south and east, combined with the mighty Danube delta which empties into the Black Sea within Romanian borders, support one of the largest numbers of bird species in Europe. The Romanian culture and buildings have also been preserved, including the medieval city of Sighisoara, and the many fortified churches and castles such as Bran Castle which has long been associated with the Dracula legend.



European Roller. D Petrescu

This tour is one of our most popular international destinations and covers a great diversity of topography and geology designed to maximise our wildlife viewing opportunities. We include the alpine areas for species such as Alpine Marmot, Wallcreeper, Alpine Accentor and Ring Ouzel, the wild forests of Transylvania for large carnivores and raptors like Lesser-spotted Eagle, the Danube delta for a huge variety of waterbirds including White and Dalmatian Pelican and the Black Sea for a variety of gulls and terns. We are once again offering this trip in late spring as soon as the Transfăgăraşan Pass opens, so that we have further opportunities to see spring wildflowers.

We will be staying in comfortable en suite rooms in hotels and B&Bs throughout and will also have exclusive access to a floating hotel with en suite rooms in the delta of the Danube from which we will go out exploring the smaller channels in a boat.

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- 395 bird species have been recorded in Romania
- High chance of Brown Bear and several other European mammal species
- Visit a variety of habitats in iconic areas such as the Carpathian Mountains, Danube delta and the Dobrogea region of Romania as well as visiting the Black Sea.
- Explore Transylvania and the castles that inspired the Dracula legends.
- Exclusive stay on a floating hotel on the Danube Delta

TOUR LEADER:

- Inala Nature Tours leader with local guide



ITINERARY OUTLINE:

- Day 1. Mon 22 Aug 2022. Arrive Bucharest (most probably fly in as a group). Accom: Bucharest
- Day 2. Tue 23 Aug 2022. Bucharest to Vidraru Lake. Accom: near Vidraru Lake.
- Day 3. Wed 24 Aug 2022. Vidraru Lake to Sibiu. Accom: Sibiu.
- Day 4. Thu 25 Aug 2022. Sibiu-Sighisoara-Zarnesti. Accom: Zarnesti.
- Day 5. Fri 26 Aug 2022. Zarnesti-Kingstone Mountains NP. Accom: Zarnesti.
- Day 6. Sat 27 Aug 2022. Zarnesti-Kingstone Mountains NP. Accom: Zarnesti.
- Day 7. Sun 28 Aug 2022. Zarnesti to Tulcea. Accom: Floating hotel on the Danube delta.
- Day 8. Mon 29 Aug 2022. Danube Delta. Accom: Floating hotel on the Danube delta.
- Day 9. Tue 30 Aug 2022. Danube Delta. Accom: Floating hotel on the Danube delta.
- Day 10. Wed 31 Aug 2022. Danube Delta. Accom: Floating hotel on the Danube delta.
- Day 11. Thu 1 Sept 2022. Danube Delta. Accom: Floating hotel on the Danube delta.
- Day 12. Fri 2 Sept 2022. Dobrogea region- Parches and Macin Mountains National Park. Accom: Tulcea.
- Day 13. Sat 3 Sept 2022. Babadag- Black Sea coast. Accom: Tulcea.
- Day 14. Sun 4 Sept 2022. Tulcea to Bucharest. Accom: Bucharest.
- Day 15. Mon 5 Sept 2022. Depart Bucharest. Accom: none.

DETAILED ITINERARY:

B- breakfast; L- lunch; D-dinner

Day 1. Monday 22 August 2022. Pre-tour. Details of where we will meet today will be advised once we have a better idea of the origin of the participants. The most suitable option may once again be to meet at Heathrow Airport (International terminal) and travel together to Bucharest but it may be better to meet at Bucharest. Tonight we will have a group welcome dinner this evening where we will have an introduction to the tour.

Accommodation: Hotel in Bucharest (ensuite room). **Meals included:** D

Day 2. Tuesday 23 August 2022. Bucharest to Vidraru Lake. After breakfast this morning, we will travel from Bucharest to Vidraru Lake (2.5 – 3 hours' drive) which lies in the shadow of the Făgăraş Mountains. This artificial lake was created in 1965 by the construction of the Vidraru Dam on the Argeş River and a village still lies submerged at the bottom of the lake. En route we will visit the spectacular marble and sandstone Curtea de Argeş cathedral, built in early 16th century, when Wallachia was an independent territory under Prince Neagoe Basarab. We will also pass Poenari Castle, one of the fortresses of Vlad III (Vlad the Impaler) who inspired Bram Stoker's fictional creation, Count Dracula. This abandoned 13th century castle was repaired in the 15th Century by Vlad, who realized the potential for a fortress perched high on a steep rock precipice. The castle once again fell into disrepair after his death and only the ruins of the walls and towers stand today. **Accommodation:** Hotel next to Vidraru Lake (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Day 3. Wednesday 24 August 2022. Vidraru Lake to Sibiu. After breakfast, we will cross the mountains to Sibiu on the Transfăgăraşan road, built in the early 1970s by Nicolae Ceausescu as a response to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union. The road climbs to an altitude of 2,042 metres, making it the second highest mountain pass in Romania after the Transalpina and offers great chances for Wallcreeper, raptors and other mountain bird species such as Ring Ouzel and Alpine Accentor. Mammal-wise we can observe Alpine Marmots and Chamois at the highest altitudes. A profusion of alpine flora such as Gentians, Wild Pansy and Wolfsbane should be observed growing amongst the rocks. After passing through the Lake Balea Tunnel we will emerge into the Transylvanian region of Romania (Transylvania is named for the dense forests that cloak the lower slopes of the mountains and the plains below). We will visit the medieval city of Sibiu on our arrival. Built in the 12th century by German settlers known as Transylvanian Saxons, the riches amassed by its guilds paid for the construction of both impressive buildings and the fortifications required to protect them. Sections of the medieval wall still guard the historic area, where narrow streets pass steep-roofed 17th century buildings with gable overhangs before opening into vast, church-dominated squares. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Sibiu (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Day 4. Thursday 25 August 2022. Sighisoara to Zarnesti. Today will visit Sighisoara, Vlad Dracula's birthplace, which has its origins in Roman times and still stands as one of the most beautiful and best-preserved medieval towns in Europe and has been designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Sighisoara played an important



strategic and commercial role at the edges of Central Europe for several centuries and became one of the most important cities of Transylvania, with artisans from throughout the Holy Roman Empire visiting the settlement. The German artisans and craftsmen dominated the urban economy, and also built the fortifications to protect it. In the afternoon we will also visit Bran Castle which has also been associated with the Dracula legend, thus completing our foray into the Transylvanian vampire mythology, before traveling to our accommodation in nearby

Zarnesti. Bird species we should see en route include Lesser Spotted Eagle, Northern Shrike (formerly Great Grey Shrike), Red-backed Shrike, and White Storks nesting in some of the townships. **Accommodation:** Guesthouse in Zarnesti (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

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Days 5 & 6. Friday 26 & Saturday 27 August 2022. Zarnesti-Kingstone Mountains NP. We will spend two



Brown Bear D. Petrescu

days in the Gorges of Zarnesti in the Piatra Craiuhui (Kingstone Mountains) National Park tracking large carnivores and visiting the ancient Spruce, Fir and Beech woods. Bear and deer tracks are almost always seen, and we will also look for traces of wolf and wildcat/lynx. A large variety of birds are also found here, including Wallcreeper, Tree Creeper, Alpine Swift, Crag Martin, Serine, Crossbills, Black Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Honey Buzzard etc. On both evenings, we will visit a bear hide located in the forest where we will have the chance to watch the bears and other species such as Wild Boar from the shelter of a small hut. We

will also be hopeful of seeing Eurasian Wolf and Eurasian Lynx. **Accommodation:** Guesthouse in Zarnesti (en suite rooms) as for last night. **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Day 7. Sunday 28 August 2022. Zarnesti to Tulcea. Today is predominantly a day of travel. After breakfast we will travel towards Tulcea, the gate of Danube Delta, crossing the Danube at Brăila by vehicle ferry. We will then transfer to our floating hotel where we will spend the next 5 nights (we have sole use of the whole boat). **Accommodation:** Floating hotel on the Danube delta (cabins with en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Days 8-11. Monday 29 August to Thursday 1 September 2022 inclusive. Danube delta. During these days

we'll explore Danube Delta with its narrow reed- and waterlily-lined channels and lakes, bird colonies, reed beds and large willow forests. You will have the chance to see colonies of White Pelican, Dalmatian Pelican and Cormorants (including Pygmy Cormorant), also many *Locustella* and *Acrocephalus* warblers (including Savi's, Sedge, Paddyfield, Moustached, Marsh, Reed, Great Reed warbler), egrets, herons, Common Sandpipers, Green Sandpipers and Greenshanks, Kingfishers, Penduline Tits and other reed bed species (including Little Bittern). Raptors will include frequent sightings of Marsh Harriers whilst the Red-footed Falcons will be seen in small groups hunting insects. There is also a chance of locating one of the ten breeding pairs of White-tailed



White Pelican by D. Petrescu

Eagles that live here. Frogs are abundant on the vegetation in the water and channel edges and Grass Snakes can be seen swimming in the channels. Golden Jackal may also be spotted along the shoreline. On one of these days we'll travel by boat to Letea Forest, a strictly protected area of Balkan oak (*Quercus pedunculiflora*) woodland on maritime sand dunes. This area is the oldest natural reservation in Romania, established in 1938 and covering approximately 2,825 hectares. This forest was the initial foundation of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, which has been declared a World Heritage Site. It was internationally recognized as a Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the

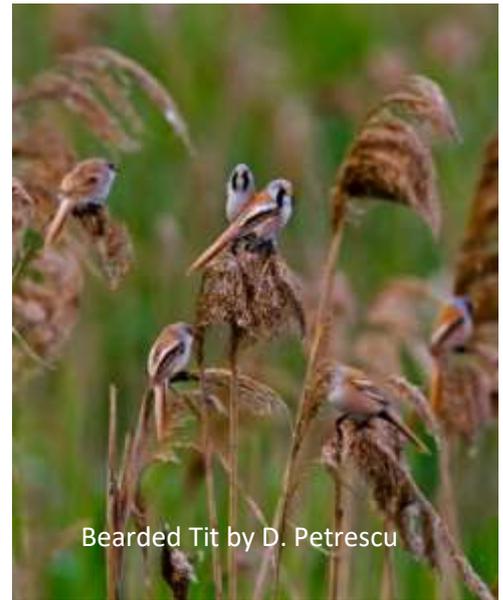


Floating hotel Danube delta. D. Petrescu

Biosphere Program in 1992. We will travel around by horse and cart driven by one of the local residents; this will be a good day for finding a variety of mammals, lizards and birds. The flora is also amazing, with many endemic species of trees and flowering plants. We will also visit a few traditional villages from the Delta, such as Letea village. **Accommodation:** Floating hotel on the Danube delta (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D each day.

Day 12. Friday 2 September 2022. Dobrogea region-Parches and Macin Mountains National Park. Today we will explore the Dobrogea region (Parches and Macin Mountains National Park) of Romania, which extends along the Black Sea coast from Ukraine to Bulgaria. In the morning we will visit Parches, a 30-minute drive from Tulcea where we will have great views over the Delta. We can expect to see a large range of birds. Raptors include Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Marsh Harrier. We should also see European Suslik (Ground Squirrel) foraging over the grasslands. We will then travel to the Macin Mountains (the oldest mountains in Europe). These granite ranges were pushed up during the continental collisions that formed Pangea (around 300-400 million years ago). The steppe here is dotted with Oriental Hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*) and the lower slopes of the mountains are covered in oak forest. Here we will look for interesting species like Long-legged Buzzard, Isabelline Wheatear, Rock Thrush, Ortolan Bunting, Corn Bunting and Hoopoe. The scenery here is also wonderful.

Accommodation: Hotel in Tulcea (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D



Bearded Tit by D. Petrescu

Day 13. Saturday 3 September 2022. Babadag- Black Sea coast. After breakfast we will travel southwards,



Levant Sparrowhawk. D. Petrescu

passing through small villages en route. On our way we will make a stop at Babadag Forest where several species of woodpeckers, Hawfinches and raptors such as Honey Buzzard and Imperial Eagle are commonly seen in addition to many rare plant species. If we are lucky, we may also see Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) grazing on the vegetation here. The Sinoe-Razelm lake complex lies to the south of the Danube Delta. An extensive sand spit has isolated the area from the Black Sea and has left behind a series of shallow, brackish lakes, which are extremely rich in birds, including Sandwich,

Caspian and Gull-billed Tern, Little Gull, Pied Avocet, Ruff, Little and Temminck's Stint, and Common Shelduck and a selection of plovers and sandpipers. Our main stop (for lunch) will be at Histria, where there is a large salt marsh containing scattered pools. Herons and ducks can be seen in large numbers, *Acrocephalus* warblers can be seen quite well here, in addition to Balkan yellow wagtail and numerous waders. This is also the main feeding area for the small delta population of Dalmatian Pelicans. A variety of wildflowers should also be seen. We will have time to walk across the marsh to the ancient Greek-Roman port of Histria, located on the western coast of the Black Sea and the first urban settlement on Romanian territory founded in the 7th century BC. It was under Roman rule from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. Invasions during the 7th century AD rendered it indefensible, and the city was abandoned. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Tulcea (en suite rooms) as for last night. **Meals included:** B, L, D

Day 14. Sunday 4 September 2022. Tulcea to Bucharest. We will leave Tulcea early this morning to travel back to Bucharest, the capital and largest city of Romania, as well as its cultural, industrial, and financial centre. This afternoon will be spent visiting features of interest, including the Palace of the Parliament, the seat of Romanian government. Ordered by Ceausescu in 1984, the Palace took 13 years to build; the interior still remains unfinished. It is the heaviest building in the world and the second largest administrative building. (Only the Pentagon is larger.) The Palace extends eight storeys underground and includes a nuclear bunker. We will also visit the National Village Museum, exploring its fascinating display of Romanian houses, churches and farm buildings, some of which date back to the early 19th Century. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Bucharest (en suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Day 15. Monday 5 September 2022. Depart Bucharest. We transfer to Bucharest airport this morning for our departure flights to our various destinations. **Accommodation:** none. **Meals included:** B.

2022 Tour Price TBC (2021 Price = AU\$8,200 per person twin share **Single supplement: AU\$990)**

Group size: 6 -12 people + Inala tour leader + local guide.

Price includes: 14 nights' accommodation at 3 to 4 star standard guesthouses and hotels in Vidraru Lake, Sibiu, Tulcea, Zarnesti, Bucharest and on the floating hotel on the Danube delta, specialist guide and transport on water and land, return transfers from/to Bucharest, all meals, entrance fees and activities as mentioned in the itinerary (including access to bear hides).

Price does not include: International and domestic airfares, alcoholic beverages, snacks, internet, gratuities, laundry or other items of a personal nature or activities not mentioned in the itinerary.

Please note:

- **Meals and drinks:** Breakfast generally consists of a buffet style breakfast with cereal, fruit and yoghurt and tea/coffee, usually with a selection of meats and cheeses. A full cooked breakfast is not generally offered at most locations. Lunch will generally consist of a packed lunch style meal eaten in the field, but we may sometimes eat at a local cafe. Dinner usually consists of several options for main with the choice of either an appetiser or dessert although sometimes three course meals are available. Drinks (soft and alcoholic) are generally not included but at lunches and breakfasts juice may be made available.
- **The itinerary:** Whilst we aim to follow the itinerary as planned, please note that the itinerary provided should only be used as a guideline. Depending on individual trip circumstances, weather, and local information, the exact itinerary may not be strictly adhered to. The guides reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary as they see fit.
- **Mobility:** This tour is suitable for a range of activity levels and there are options for joining some walks and for more relaxed touring nearer the vehicle if you prefer.



Transport at Letea T. Cochran



Romanian countryside. D. Petrescu